

**MINUTES  
of the  
THIRD MEETING  
of the  
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**August 18, 2015  
Ralph Edwards Auditorium — Civic Center  
Truth or Consequences**

The third meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was called to order by Representative Bob Wooley, co-chair, on August 18, 2015 at 10:15 a.m. in the Ralph Edwards Auditorium of the civic center in Truth or Consequences.

**Present**

Rep. Bob Wooley, Co-Chair  
Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon  
Sen. Craig W. Brandt  
Sen. William F. Burt

**Absent**

Sen. Richard C. Martinez, Co-Chair  
Rep. George Dodge, Jr.  
Rep. Dianne Miller Hamilton  
Sen. Daniel A. Ivey-Soto

**Advisory Members**

Rep. David E. Adkins  
Rep. Randal S. Crowder  
Sen. Michael Padilla  
Sen. John Pinto  
Rep. John L. Zimmerman

Rep. Cathrynn N. Brown  
Sen. Carlos R. Cisneros  
Rep. Jim Dines  
Rep. Rick Little  
Sen. William H. Payne  
Sen. William E. Sharer  
Rep. Jim R. Trujillo

**Guest Legislator**

Sen. Cisco McSorley (appointed as voting member for the meeting)

**Staff**

Jeret Fleetwood, Researcher, Legislative Council Service (LCS)  
Peter Kovnat, Staff Attorney, LCS  
Kathleen Dexter, Researcher, LCS

**Guests**

The guest list is in the meeting file.

**Handouts**

Copies of all handouts and other written testimony are in the meeting file.

**Tuesday, August 18**

**College Credit for Military Training — Approaches in Other States**

Suzanne Hultin, policy specialist, Education Program, National Conference of State Legislatures, gave a presentation on what other states are doing to provide veterans with college credits for their military experience and training.

Twenty states have passed legislation mandating that either their higher education systems or their higher education institutions adopt policies to accept "prior learning assessments", such as those developed by the American Council on Education, that might be used in assigning credit for military experience. The council has developed a partial database of military training and suggested correlations to college credit, though each state or institution has final discretion in what credit, if any, is assigned to a veteran student. While New Mexico does not have a statewide policy for accepting prior learning assessments, six of the state's higher education institutions assign credits for "life experiences", including military experience.

Prior learning assessments and transcript evaluations are currently inconsistent, not only across New Mexico institutions but also within each institution. Transcripts must be evaluated individually, and the process is hampered in part by the sudden increase in recent years of veterans leaving the service and enrolling in college. A study by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning shows that students who are given prior learning assessments are 2.5 times more likely to graduate, yet many New Mexico veteran students are not getting these assessments and are at increased risk of dropping out.

On questioning, Ms. Hultin and committee members noted that:

- (1) most of the college credit assigned for military experience goes toward elective or physical education credits, not core degree credits; and
- (2) the American Council on Education is working with the federal Department of Defense to develop military transcripts.

**College Credit for Military Training — New Mexico**

Harrison Rommel, Ph.D., financial aid director, Higher Education Department (HED), and Alan Martinez, deputy secretary, Veterans' Services Department (VSD), continued the discussion by outlining the challenges faced by higher education institutions when trying to assign credit hours for military training and experience.

In addition to two veteran-specific scholarship programs administered by the state, veteran students have access to federal education benefits commonly referred to as the "GI Bill". Benefits under this program are limited and must be used within 15 years of leaving the military. When a veteran student receives credit for military training, those credits are deducted from the total benefits available under the veteran's GI Bill, thus reducing the benefits available to complete the veteran's degree. If legislation is signed into law that requires New Mexico institutions to adopt the guidelines developed by the American Council on Education — a

blanket requirement to grant credits for military training — many veterans will end up with too many credits that do not apply to their degrees and too few benefits remaining to pay for the courses they need. In addition, veteran students who receive military training credits from a New Mexico institution may not be able to transfer those credits to out-of-state institutions if they move, and they would not be able to recover the GI Bill benefits expended on those credits.

On questioning, the presenters and committee members noted that:

- (1) coordination on issuing credits for military experience is difficult because New Mexico has more than 30 higher education institutions, each with its own governing board and autonomy over its curriculum;
- (2) the State Approving Agency — an office within the VSD that approves higher education courses for GI Bill and other federal Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits — is working to coordinate across institutions;
- (3) the common course numbering system required by the provisions of House Bill 282 (2015 regular session), with an implementation deadline of July 1, 2017, will help with the coordination efforts, but the system will have to involve deans and faculty, not just registrars;
- (4) the HED is developing a list of courses at each state institution for which a veteran can get credit based on military training;
- (5) GI Bill tuition benefits are paid directly to schools, while GI Bill stipend benefits are paid to students;
- (6) veterans who have exhausted their GI Bill benefits can qualify for assistance through the state's Military War Veterans Scholarship program; and
- (7) the Vietnam Veterans Scholarship program receives an annual appropriation of \$141,000 and does not need additional funds at this time.

### **College Credit for Military Training — Student Perspective**

Albert S. Gamiochipi and Polly Schaefer, vice president and public relations officer, respectively, of the Student Veterans Association of New Mexico State University (NMSU), gave a student perspective on the issue of credit for military training.

In what the presenters referred to as the "Goldilocks Paradox", veteran students often receive either too much military training credit that they cannot use toward their degrees or little to no credit that would be directly applicable to their degrees. In a case illustrating too much credit, a veteran student who transferred to NMSU was given 132 credit hours based on prior coursework and military training, but only 24 credits applied to the student's degree. The remaining credits served only to render the student ineligible for financial aid by the student's third year in college. In a case illustrating too little credit, a veteran whose eight years as a military computer technician included three overseas deployments was not given credit to offset either a required "Viewing the Wider World" course or a required "Introduction to Computers" course. The subject of both cases was the same veteran student.

The presenters urged the committee to pass legislation to require that higher education institutions only grant credits for military training that count toward a veteran student's degree.

On questioning, the presenters and committee members noted that:

- (1) GI Bill benefits are limited to 190 credits;
- (2) institutions do not get any funds for credits they award for military training;
- (3) a veteran student can protest the number of credits awarded, though most do not know they can do this; and an institution can adjust the credits deducted from a student's GI Bill benefits;
- (4) the State Approving Agency is working with certifying officials at each institution on aligning the credits for military training with what each veteran student needs for graduation; and
- (5) Texas' College Credit for Heroes pilot program was funded through the federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998.

### **Minutes**

On a motion duly made, seconded and unanimously adopted, the minutes from the July 10, 2015 meeting were approved.

### **New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology Veterans Programs**

Luz Diaz Barreras, veterans' administrator, New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology (NMIMT), reported on programs that she administers for veterans at the institute.

Participation in the school's veterans programs has doubled since 2008. The 46 veteran students currently participating access a variety of benefits under several federal programs that provide funding for tuition and fees, textbooks, housing stipends and monthly stipends. Resources at the school also extend beyond school and coursework to cover health and mental health issues, including assistance for veteran students who have posttraumatic stress disorder to an extent that it affects their ability to attend class. Some veterans at the school have exhausted their benefits but still interact with the veteran student community through the NMIMT Veterans Club, which was formed in 2014.

On questioning, Ms. Barreras and committee members noted that:

- (1) the male-to-female ratio among veteran students at NMIMT is approximately 2:1, which matches the ratio in the general student population;
- (2) the school cannot track success or graduation rates in veteran students who do not self-identify; those who choose not to come forward may have exceeded the 15-year time limit for accessing GI Bill benefits or exhausted their benefits prior to enrollment;
- (3) veteran students may use the lottery tuition scholarship and GI Bill benefits simultaneously, but tuition that is paid with scholarship funds is deducted from the student's available benefits through the GI Bill; and
- (4) the Veterans Club is developing a mentoring program for veteran students.

## **Aging and Long-Term Care Issues Facing Veterans**

Mitchell Lawrence, health care coordinator, VSD, and Carlos Moya, director, Consumer and Elder Rights Division, Aging and Long-Term Services Department, gave a presentation on projected needs for veterans' long-term care in New Mexico.

Of the state's 89,000 veterans who are 65 years or older, an estimated 16 percent will require long-term care of some kind. There are just over 200 long-term care beds available in three area facilities — the New Mexico State Veterans' Home in Truth or Consequences, the Fort Bayard Medical Center in Santa Clara and the Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center in Albuquerque — though projections show a need for 417 beds. The VA has a per diem program under which veterans can receive care in private long-term care facilities, but the facilities must meet VA standards, and the program's benefits vary depending on the era in which a veteran served in the armed forces. The VA's focus is to keep veterans in their homes as long as possible by preventing incidents, such as falls or medication imbalances, that might precipitate a move into residential care. The Consumer and Elder Rights Division also works to keep veterans in their homes through its Veterans Self-Directed Care program, a home- and community-based care program it administers in partnership with the VA. Under the program, which currently serves up to 35 veterans in the Taos and Pecos areas, a veteran has complete control over choosing and managing services and providers, and care is provided in the veteran's home.

On questioning, the presenters and committee members noted that:

- (1) the VSD is working to make all private nursing homes aware of the VA's per diem program and the standards they must meet in order to qualify;
- (2) under the Veterans Self-Directed Care program, a veteran contracts directly with providers and may hire family members as caregivers; under a similar care program in Medicaid, care is contracted through provider agencies;
- (3) the Veterans Self-Directed Care program includes an incident report system and both scheduled and unscheduled site visits;
- (4) if a veteran's needs expand beyond services available in the Veterans Self-Directed Care program, the veteran is moved out of the home;
- (5) a veteran must liquidate all assets prior to moving into the New Mexico State Veterans' Home; and
- (6) most of the facilities and resources available to veterans in New Mexico are clustered along the Rio Grande corridor, with little available to veterans in the state's rural areas.

## **New Mexico State Veterans' Home Update**

Jeremy Averella, chief facilities officer, Department of Health (DOH), Stephen Dorman, M.D., chief medical officer, DOH, Michael Browne, facilities manager, DOH, and Donna Deason, interim administrator, New Mexico State Veterans' Home, gave a presentation on the mission of the New Mexico State Veterans' Home and its current initiatives.

The New Mexico State Veterans' Home, housed in what was originally the Carrie Tingley Children's Hospital facility, provides residential long-term care not only to veterans but also to

veterans' spouses and parents of armed service members killed in action, or "Gold Star" parents. The home receives minimal operational funding through the state; the majority of its funding comes through Medicaid, Medicare, the VA, private insurance and private payments. The home currently serves 128 residents, with capacity for 135, and offers assisted living, intermediate care and skilled nursing care. Capacity will increase to nearly 200 when a new Alzheimer's unit is complete in 2017.

Other initiatives that the New Mexico State Veterans' Home has under way include a new tele-psychiatry program, with providers based in Albuquerque, and an intensive outpatient chemical dependency program, which is also available in Roswell, Fort Bayard and Albuquerque.

On questioning, the presenters and committee members noted that:

- (1) the chemical dependency program requires specialized staff and has been set up only in areas where trained staff and adequate facilities are already available;
- (2) the state has provided \$12 million to construct the Alzheimer's unit; the balance — 65% of the project total — comes from the VA;
- (3) the architectural firm for the facilities expansion is based in Las Cruces; and
- (4) the new facilities will be Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, certified.

#### **Tour of New Mexico State Veterans' Home**

Committee members toured the New Mexico State Veterans' Home facilities and grounds.

#### **Adjournment**

The committee adjourned at 4:15 p.m.